



United States Attorney's Office
District of Arizona



The Navajo Nation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Thursday, August 7, 2008

For Information Contact
SANDY RAYNOR
Telephone: (602) 514-7625
Cell: (602) 525-2681

TRAINING TARGETS PREVENTION OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE

Law enforcement and school officials attend half-day training

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Since the horrific attack on students at Columbine High School in 1999, Americans have become all too familiar with school shooting incidents, from Jonesboro, Arkansas to Red Lake, Minnesota, and the worst such recorded incident in U.S. history at the Virginia Tech Campus, where one gunman killed 32 students and faculty and wounded dozens before killing himself. The recent deadly shooting at South Mountain Community College is also a reminder of the risks faced by students, school personnel and peace officers on school campuses everywhere.

Today, the United States Attorney's Office in Arizona and the Navajo Nation held a half-day "Safe Schools Summit" at the Veteran's Memorial Field House in Window Rock. The seminar was hosted by the Window Rock Unified School District and featured former Minnesota U.S. Attorney Thomas Heffelfinger and the Navajo Division of Public Safety. The goal of the seminar was to provide schools and law enforcement officials with tools and strategies to help prevent and respond to crises on campus. Approximately 50 school officials, teachers, counselors, and police officers from throughout the Navajo Nation and the northern Arizona region.

In opening remarks, U.S. Attorney Diane J. Humetewa stated: "Because of the alarming number of these tragic and baffling events, it is now a phenomenon that can be studied, understood and hopefully prevented. Without a doubt preventing - or in the worse case - responding to such an event requires the coordinated efforts of schools and law enforcement at every level. Responding to any crisis erupting on campus requires coordination by teachers, administrators, first-responders, physical and mental health care workers, and parents, among many others."

Superintendent Thomas Jackson, of the Window Rock Unified School District said "No school is immune from violence, especially in rural isolated schools. You cannot educate kids unless they feel safe. For us to do our job, they need to feel safe."

In a special morning session, former Minnesota U.S. Attorney Thomas Heffelfinger presented a lessons learned seminar on the March 2005 shootings at Red Lake High School in Minnesota. In that incident a 16 year-old student killed five students, a teacher, and a school security officer before killing himself. The student had previously killed his grandfather and his grandfather's domestic partner.

-MORE-

Mr. Heffelfinger also drew his presentation from the 2002 report by the U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center and the U.S. Department of Education's Safe and Drug Free Schools Program. The 2002 report looks at data from 25 years of shooting incidents on school campuses in the United States. In 81% of these types of incidents, at least one person other than the shooter(s) was aware of a possible attack. For more information on school safety, visit www.ed.gov/emergencyplan

Following Mr. Heffelfinger's presentation, the Navajo Division of Public Safety presented training on "Bomb Threats and Lockdowns."

The U.S. Attorney's Office has prosecutorial jurisdiction over violent felony crimes on Arizona's 21 Indian reservations. Preventing and reducing violent crime occurring in Indian Country is a major priority of the U.S. Attorney's Office and the U.S. Department of Justice.

A Safe Schools seminar was previously hosted by the U.S. Attorney's Office and the U.S. Secret Service at the Mesa Public Training Facility in September 2007. It was attended by over 300 police officers, first responders, health and education personnel.

RELEASE NUMBER: 2008-195(Safe Schools Initiative)

#